

out of Iraq, and that is a fair debate. What happens if the other side is wrong? What happens if a reasonable redeployment over the next year would work, and the Iraqi Government would be able to handle it? Think about the "what if" there.

We had a moment of silence on the floor, I believe on October 31, for the two thousandth American troop killed in the Iraq war. I believe last week we had a moment of silence for No. 2,500. What if they are wrong? What if we can get out of there now in a reasonable way and refocus on the fight against terrorism so we don't have to stand here and have that moment for No. 3,000, for No. 3,500, for No. 10,000. That is the direction we are heading, and the American people know it. Do we think it makes sense for our national security to have some 135,000 American troops on the ground in harm's way without any clear idea of how that is going to change the situation in Iraq?

Mr. President, it was bad strategy to go into Iraq in the first place, and it is a bad strategy to stay there because we are there and we don't want to admit that it was a bad idea in the first place. Some will say: Well, what you are saying then is those who have died have died in vain in Iraq. I disagree. I think anytime an American gives his or her life pursuant to a decision of our democracy, it is impossible for that person to die in vain. That is how our system works. I voted against this war. I didn't think it was a good idea. But we voted on it. That is how it works. As long as those troops fight in that spirit in support of a democratic decision, they do not die in vain, and we honor them for their sacrifice.

If the policy is wrong, if we made a mistake, we owe it to their families, we owe it to those who are injured, we owe it to those who are still there and who will still go and who will die in the future to correct that mistake, to change course. We owe it to them to do what makes the most sense.

What makes the most sense? We have, in my view, two choices—not this absurd notion that somebody wants all the troops to leave tomorrow. Choice No. 1 is a completely open-ended commitment, with no guarantee that this will end anytime in the near future or a commitment to finish the mission by a reasonable date and redeploy the troops where they can be better used to help us in the fight against those who attacked us on 9/11.

Mr. President, I heard the junior Senator from Virginia say: We don't need to embolden our enemy. It is his view that the idea of having a reasonable timetable to bring the troops out emboldens the enemy. Well, I will tell you what emboldens the enemy: Thinking they have us in a trap and we don't know how to get out. That emboldens and exhilarates them. They wanted us in Iraq. They are glad we are in Iraq. And they are using it as a way to fuel the hatred that generated 9/11. That is the bottom line.

To me, this is about national security. To me, this is about those who attacked us on 9/11. This administration and this Congress made a mistake by thinking that Iraq was the logical next step in this fight. It is time to reverse course. It is time to redeploy. It is time to focus on the real security of the American people.

Mr. President, how much time do I have?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Fourteen minutes.

Mr. FEINGOLD. I yield back the time to the Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I am going to speak, obviously, a little bit in an abbreviated fashion at this point, and then I will reserve time and speak again later because of the way things have worked out.

I want to thank the Senator from Wisconsin. I want to thank him for his foresight and his leadership with respect to this issue, and I also want to thank him for his cooperation and efforts in the last days to put together what I think is a reasonable and sensible approach to how we deal with an obviously complicated situation.

Let me say that I have heard this debate over the course of the last days and I have listened carefully and I am saddened, in a sense—but I guess I have grown to expect it in the course of our politics—that there is an awful lot of characterization going around, an awful lot of stereotype sloganeering which tries to characterize something as other than what it is. It is what we have come to.

The fact is that this amendment is not what it is being characterized as. I have heard a number of people say it is a precipitous withdrawal. I have heard obviously the words "cut and run" and other words used many times.

Let me first point out the differences between this and the other amendment that has already been debated. First of all, this is binding. The other amendment is a sense of the Senate, and our troops and our country deserve more than a sense of the Senate. They deserve a policy.

Secondly, we have a date; the other is open-ended. It is almost like what President Bush is doing. We are going to stay the course and be open-ended.

Thirdly, this has an over-the-horizon force specifically to protect the security interests of the United States of America in the region and with respect to Iraq. But in addition to that, this amendment specifically strengthens the national security of the United States. It is not an abandonment of Iraq; it is, in fact, a way of empowering Iraq to stand up on its two feet and for the Iraqis to be able to do what they have expressed their desire to do, which is have their sovereignty.

It is interesting. In the last day we had a huge debate about the sovereignty of Iraq, and colleague after colleague came down and said how important it is to respect the sovereignty

of Iraq. Well, this amendment respects the sovereignty of Iraq. In fact, it increases the sovereignty of Iraq. It provides specifically for three provisos under which the President has the ability to be able to lead troops. There is no abandonment of Iraq. It sets a date by which, over the course of the next year, the Iraqis themselves have said they have the ability to be able to take over their own security. Prime Minister Maliki said a few days ago that by the end of this year—December—in 16 out of 18 provinces, they will be able to take care of their own security. This amendment holds them accountable.

In addition to that, it provides for the ability of the President to maintain a minimal number of forces who are critical to the job of standing up Iraqi security forces, of conducting targeted and specialized counterterrorism operations like the kind that got Zarqawi and also protecting United States facilities and personnel.

So even when you reach the date of next year—ample enough time for the Iraqis to complete the task of standing up—it will be 4 years, Mr. President, next year, and I think the American people have a right to expect that after 4 years, soldiers who have been trained over the course of those years are prepared to stand up for their country. In the United States of America, when we send a marine recruit to Pendleton or to Quantico, we can tell you in a matter of months when that recruit is ready for deployment. When we send a pilot to Corpus Christi or Pensacola, we can tell you exactly when they are ready to deploy. Is this administration telling us that after 4 years, we don't have Iraqis who are trained enough to drive trucks and perhaps be blown up by an IED, rather than an American soldier? Are they telling us they are not going to be prepared enough to be able to stand up for the security of Iraq?

This amendment demands the same kind of accountability that the President was prepared to demand each step of the way of the Iraqis up until this point. We set a date for the transfer of the provisional Government. They said: Oh, we can't do it that fast. We said: You have to do it that fast, and we did it. We then set a date for the Constitution and the referendum. Some Senators, some of whom have spoken against this amendment, came out and said: Oh, I think it is too early. I don't think we ought to have that date. Many of us stood up and said: No, we have to hold the date and hold them to the date. Guess what. We did it. We held them to the date and we got the Constitution.

The same thing happened for both elections. A lot of people came up and said: Oh, we can't get this all together on time; we have to delay the election. We said: No, we are going to stick with the election date, and we did. General Casey himself has said that the large presence of American troops is lending to the occupation, the sense of occupation, and it is delaying the willingness